

Into the Congo

There will not be much cheering about the news that the United States has dispatched four transport planes and a small contingent of paratroopers to the Congo. The objective is to help Premier Moise Tshombe to quell a spreading civil war in his country, and surely this objective is important. But it would be far better if the United States could find other means of supporting Mr. Tshombe without becoming directly involved in an internal conflict in the heart of the African continent.

Reportedly, Assistant Secretary of State Williams is trying to encourage other African countries to come to the help of Mr. Tshombe. Mr. Williams will have fervent wishes for success during his swing through Africa. The informed estimate is that tribal insurgents could be put down swiftly if the central government in Leopoldville could command an effective military force. Since the Chinese Communists are encouraging the rebels, there is an obvious U.S. interest in seeing Mr. Tshombe prevail.

At all costs, however, the United States ought to minimize its own contribution to Mr. Tshombe's cause. In South Viet-Nam we have already learned how a modest commitment can grow into a proxy war. Whatever the pressures from Leopoldville, this Government ought to make clear that the solution for the Congolese problem will not be found in American involvement or American guns.